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NSC BRIEFING

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ARAB ATTITUDE ON REGIONAL DEFENSE AFTER

THE SUZ SETTLEMENT

During the nearly three years that Egypt and Britain were deadlocked over Suez, Cairo strenuously opposed any Arab co-operation with the West on defense plans for the Middle East, insisting that the dispute with Britain must be resolved first. Egypt's overt and covert opposition helped induce the rest of the Arab states to forego the benefits they might have gained from association with the Western-sponsored Middle East Command in 1951 and the Middle East Defense Organization in 1952 and 1953.

In early 1954, Cairo, for the same reason, worked feverishly to block Iraqi adherence to the Turkish-Pakistani pact with its "northern tier" concept envisaging Iraqi and possible Iranian adherence. Within two weeks after the Suez accord, Egyptian minister of national guidance Salah Salim appeared in Iraq, where he largely supported Prime Minister Nuri's proposals that Middle East defense should be based on a modified version of the Arab

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League's Collective Security Pact. The United States, Britain and Turkey would be invited to join, and this arrangement would presumably take the place of the Anglo-Iraqi treaty, which expires in 1957, as well as of the newly created Turkish-Pakistani pact.

Egyptian prime minister Nasr is not prepared to accept these proposals without some modification. He has publicly announced that Egypt would take no part in any defense plan involving the Western powers, and that the Arabs would regard the presence of Western bases as "colonialism in disguise." In line with this attitude, Egypt's foreign affairs minister told Ambassador Caffery on 28 August that, for reasons of internal policy, Egypt at present preferred to have more economic aid and no military help. It is thus clear that Egypt is not ready to align itself fully with the West.

The other Arab states, each pursuing individual interests, feel impelled to give the Iraqi defense proposals appropriate lip-service while at the same time hoping to secure some western

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The Iraqi proposals have the merit of being indigenous in origin and of inviting Western counter-offers. On the other hand, these proposals implicitly suggest that the "northern tier" defense concept be dropped and that the West tie itself to a feeble Arab states pact aimed chiefly at the destruction of Israel. Despite ambiguous suggestions by Prime Minister Nuri that the new pact would prepare for peace with Israel in accordance with UN resolutions, there is no indication that any Arab state is preparing for peace. Israel would be further antagonized and aroused were these proposals accepted as a basis for Middle East defense.

It thus appears that the complex maneuvers over regional defense now occurring in the Arab world spring largely from a jockeying for position, as well as from an uncertainty on the part of Arab leaders as to how much control they have over their own peoples. These leaders are still unwilling and possibly unable to co-operate forthrightly with the West and therefore a period of bickering and bargaining appears ahead. Egypt clearly

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intends to re-establish itself as the leader of the Arab world
and to continue to prevent Iraq from achieving any preferential
alignment with the West.

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